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The innovative North – the morphosyntactic makeup of Northern English features

1. Introduction

The Northern English dialect has always aroused much controversy due to its historical and cultural background, social status, folk perceptions, and its role in the English literature. What is also controversial is the definition of the Northern dialect itself since, depending on various classifications, the North can encompass slightly different areas. The borders of the region have been widely examined by such linguists as Rohrer (1950), Wells (1982), Ihalainen (1994) or Trudgill (1999), to mention just a few. Different analyses and understanding of the extent of the Northern influence result in different mapping of the whole dialectal group, which according to Trudgill may break down to two distinct territories corresponding to a traditional or modern division; see Table 1:

Table 1. Northern dialect (adapted from Trudgill[1])

NORTH			
TRADITIONAL DIVISION	**Scots**		
	Northern	**Northumberland**	
		Lower North	Cumbria and North Lancashire
			Durham and North Yorkshire
			East Yorkshire
MODERN DIVISION	**Northern**	**Northeast**	Newcastle, Durham, Sunderland, Middlesbrough
		Lower North	**Central North:** Carlisle, Lancaster, Leeds, Bradford, York, Sheffield
			Central Lancashire: Blackburn, Burnley, Accrington
			Humberside: Hull, Scunthorpe, Grimsby
	Central	**West Central**	**Merseyside:** Liverpool, Birkenhead
			Northwest Midlands: Derby, Stoke-on-Trent, Chester, Manchester
			West Midlands: Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall
		Eastern Central	**Central Midlands:** Nottingham, Leicester
			Northeast Midlands: Lincoln, Louth
			East Midlands: Grantham, Peterborough

The lack of clear categorisation stems from the fact that it is impossible to consider dialects as static concepts abiding by geographical or political

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[1] Peter Trudgill, *The Dialects of England. Second Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 33, 67.

boundaries, or social strata. Therefore, their dynamic nature yields more to perceptual interpretation of dialectology, often based more on social and psychological factors, as studied by Preston[2] and Montgomery.[3] What is beyond any doubt, however, is the fact that traditional speech is definitely cultivated in the North where "local differences in dialect and accent as one moves from valley to valley or from village to village are sharper than in any other part of England, and become sharper the further north one goes."[4] This strong dialectal identity and loyalty is also rekindled by the presence of such societies as the Yorkshire Dialect Society, the Lancashire Dialect Society, or the Northumbrian Language Society, which are partially responsible for preservation of the Northern values.[5]

The interesting phenomenon and history of the North has given this variety the air of mystery and idiosyncrasy, which raises questions about its true nature. The following analysis is aimed, thus, at recapturing the concept of the Northern dialect's uniqueness and at examining certain morphological and syntactic features, with the intention of proving the innovative character of the North.

2. Morphosyntactic makeup of the North

Since the mediaeval times, the Northern area has proved to be a precursor of many novel linguistic solutions, introduced first locally and later spread to other regions. The area north of the Humber is very often presented as "the 'heartland' in particular for the radiating out of features that appear to have originated from Anglo-Saxon contact," such as the third person feminine <sh-> and the third person plural <th-> pronouns.[6] These new forms appeared first in the North and the North Midlands in place of the older variants *heo* and *hie.* The change is assumed to have taken place by the end of the 12th century[7] although according to

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[2] Dennis Richard Preston (ed.), *Handbook of Perceptual Dialectology* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999).

[3] Christopher Montgomery, *Northern English Dialects. A Perceptual Approach* (The University of Sheffield. Ph.D. diss., 2007).

[4] John Cecil Wells, *Accents of English. Vols. 1-3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 350–351.

[5] John David Allison Widdowson, "Sheffield dialect on the eve of the millennium," *Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society,* vol. 19 (1999), p. 10.

[6] Katie Wales, *Northern English. A Cultural and Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 89.

[7] amuel Moore, *Historical Outlines of English Sounds and Inflections* (Ann Arbor: George Wahr, 1967), p. 95.

Wełna,[8] it must have occurred not earlier than in the 13th century, since the new pronouns were first recorded in *Cursor Mundi,* originally dated back to around 1300. The process of replacement of the forms can be observed in two fragments of Northern texts taken from *The Helsinki Corpus* (HC):[9]

(1) (a) (…) and hal **hio** bið. (line 1747)
[(…)and healthy/hailed <u>she</u> is.]
(…) and miððy onfenge woeron **hia** (…) (line 1810–1811)
[(…)and when/while <u>they</u> were received (…)]
(*Lindisfarne Gospels,* LOE, c. 950–1050, Northumbrian, HC)

(b) (…) And godd wald þat **sco** sua suld do. (line 451)
[(…) And the god ruled that <u>she</u> should do in such a way.]
(…) Slan ar þ**ei** now al bidene. (line 1117)
[(…) Now <u>they</u> are all together killed.]
(*Cursor Mundi,* ME, date of the manuscript: c. 1350–1420, Northern, HC)

The excerpt (1b) above shows the early occurrence of the new pronouns *sco* and *þei,* which contributed later to the creation of *she* and *they.* In all likelihood, they developed under the Scandinavian, mainly Danish, influence as a result of the Anglo-Saxon-Danish bilingualism and "possibly of borrowing and reborrowing" between both communities.[10] The introduction of the new pronouns is partially accounted for by Ritt, whose functional theory laid the foundation for the concepts of *sign prominence* and *bi-uniqueness* as elements triggering the change. This explains why phonologically Old English [h] might have been subject to weakening when juxtaposed with more *prominent* fricatives [ð] and [s], later changed into [ʃ]. According to Ritt, the weaker sound in the pronouns must have been replaced by a more prominent one, immune to reductions and able to "contrast well with the following vowels."[11] Additionally, the Middle English process of phonological reductions and the loss of inflections must

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[8] Jerzy Wełna, *English Historical Morphology* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1996), p. 102.

[9] *The Helsinki Corpus* (HC) (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2011).

[10] Otmar Werner, "The incorporation of Old Norse pronouns into Middle English: suppletion by loan," in: *Language Contact in the British Isles,* eds. Per Sture Ureland and George Broderick (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1991), p. 393.

[11] Nikolaus Ritt, "The spread of Scandinavian third person plural pronouns in English: optimisation, adaptation and evolutionary stability," in: *Language Contact in the History of English.* 2nd, revised edition, eds. Dieter Kastovsky and Arthur Mettinger (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 291.

have also been responsible for salient homonymy among the pronouns, which in turn caused some notable ambiguity. The incorporation of the Scandinavian elements might be therefore seen as a linguistic motivation towards creating an improved and less arbitrary pronoun system,[12] which is also confirmed by Blevins who claims that "(w)hen a range of variants exists for a particular word, a speaker may choose one variant over another to maximise contrast with an otherwise homophonous word."[13] Such a tendency for optimisation is still observed in today's Northern pronouns, for example in the case of the second person singular and plural pronouns, *ye/you* and *yous/yees.* Aiming at eradicating systematic ambiguities, the modern dialect of Northumberland has developed an extra form to express the second person plural pronoun, different from its singular counterpart, as demonstrated in (2). Moreover, the Northern forms also differ with respect to their subject or non-subject function in a sentence,[14] which again shows much diligence in terms of eliminating any potential ambivalence and creating a more regular and simpler morphological system.

> (2) **Youse** lot couldn't stand it, could they?
> *[You (in plural) couldn't stand it, could you?]*
> (recording of a fifty-year-old speaker from Tyneside, ModE, dialect of Northumberland –Geordie[15])

A similar trend may be observed in the late Northumbrian mechanism of simplifying the declension where other genders of nouns began to assume the originally masculine plural marker <-(e)s>, as evidenced in (3) below. The ending "became dominant throughout England as late as the second half of the 14th century," finally surviving and replacing the southern plural marker <-(e)n>.[16]

> (3)(…) **dæges** halges (…) (line 467)
> *[(…) holy days (…)]*

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[12]   Ibid., pp. 286–295.

[13]   Juliette Blevins, *Evolutionary Phonology. The Emergence of Sound Patterns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 42.

[14]   Joan C. Beal, "The grammar of Tyneside and Northumbrian English," in: *Real English. The Grammar of English Dialects in the British Isles,* eds. James Milroy and Lesley Milroy (Harlow: Longman, 1993), p. 205.

[15]   Arthur Hughes, Peter Trudgill, and Dominic Watt, *English Accents and Dialects. An Introduction to Social and Regional Varieties of English in the British Isles* (London: Hodder Education, 2005), p. 126, line 57.

[16]   Jacek Fisiak, *A Short Grammar of Middle English.* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2004), p. 74.

(…) broðere his and **londes**. (line 514)
[(…) his brothers and <u>lands</u>.]
(*Lindisfarne Gospels,* LOE, c. 950–1050, Northumbrian, HC)

Curiously, despite its rather high consistency in Old and Middle English, the application of the plural morpheme <-(e)s)> appears much more varied in today's Northern varieties, allowing also for the occurrence of the old declension marker <-(e)n>, which proves quite common in the dialects of Northumberland, Cumberland, Lancashire and Yorkshire (4).[17] The reasons for such oddities may be found in the perceptual analysis mentioned at the beginning, invoking psychological and social factors as responsible for retention of some old features nowadays.

(4) Wi yoh'r **een** o breet un yoh'r meauths o twitch (…)
[With your <u>eyes</u> so wide and your mouths a twitch (…)]
(ModE, the dialect of Yorkshire[18])

When it comes to the implementation of new forms, the nominal plural marker was, however, not the only example of simplification in morphological inflections introduced in the North as similar changes affected also the Middle English verbal paradigm which considerably diverged from the one typical of other dialects of that time, such as East Midland; see Table 2:

Table 2. Middle English conjugation (adapted from Wełna[19])

	EAST MIDLAND	NORTH
	(PRESENT) INDICATIVE	
1Sg	-e	-(e)s/-
2Sg	-st	-(e)s > -is
3Sg	-th	-(e)s
Pl	-en	-(e)s

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[17]   Martin F. Wakelin, *English Dialects. An Introduction* (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), pp. 109–110.

[18]   Ammon Wrigley, *The Bill's O' Jack's Grace. Spoken at a 'Churn' Supper,* in: *Words Throo' T' Shuttle Ee: An Anthology of Industrial Dialect Verse from Victorian South and West Yorkshire,* ed. Gerald England (Ilkley: Yorkshire Dialect Society, 1983), p. 12, line 2.

[19]   Jerzy Wełna, *English Historical Morphology* (1996), pp. 107–108.

	(PRESENT) SUBJUNCTIVE	
Sg	-e	-
Pl	-e(n)	-
	(PRESENT) IMPERATIVE	
2Sg	- / -e	-
2Pl	-eth	-es
	(PRETERITE) INDICATIVE	
1Sg	-e / -	-e / -
2Sg	-est / -e	-est / -e
3Sg	-e / -	-e / -
Pl	-e(n)	-
	(PRETERITE) SUBJUNCTIVE	
Sg	-e	-
Pl	-e(n)	-
Inf	-e(n)	-e(n)
PrP	-end	-and
	-ing	-ing
PP	-(e)d / -en	-(e)d / -en

The Northern dialect not only reduced some of the verbal endings but also developed a new morpheme <-(e)s> in the forms of its present singular and plural indicative as well as plural imperative (6). This new creation might have been brought about by way of analogy with the old second person singular marker or, following Shields' argumentation, it might have been "a fast variant of the earlier suffix –eth."[20] Irrespective of its origin, in the late 15th century the morpheme spread to the Midlands, where it was first used in colloquial speech in the third person singular verbs, later becoming a common feature of Standard English.[21]

> (6) (a) Here I se þou **sittes** and **restes** (…) (line 426)
> *[Here I see you <u>sit</u> and <u>rest</u> (…)]*
> Al men þat **drinkes** of þis well (…) (line 443)

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[20] Kenneth Shields, Jr., "Fast speech and the origin of the Standard English verbal suffix –s," *Journal of English Linguistics* 14 (1980), pp. 24–35.

[21] Jerzy Wełna (1996), p. 108.

> [All men that <u>drink</u> from this spring (…)]
> (*Northern Homily Cycle,* ME, c. 1350–1420, Northern, HC)

Interestingly, in today's Northern dialects, the morpheme <-(e)s> is even more productive, marking both singular and plural verbal forms, and sometimes appearing in conjunction with other parts of speech, as presented below:

> (7) (a) 'Come here a minute, I'll tell you.' I **says**, 'I can (…)
> [*'Come here for a minute, I'll tell you.' I <u>say</u>, "I can (…)]*
> (…) and **maybes** a packet of Woodbines for tuppence (…)
> *[(…) and <u>maybe</u> a packet of Woodbines for tuppence (…)]*
> (recording of a fifty-year-old speaker from Tyneside, ModE, dialect of Northumberland –Geordie[22])
>
> (b) T' men **gangs** right to t' top o' Rise Hill.
> *[The men <u>go</u> right to the top of Rise Hill.]*
> (*Sports at Dent Fair*, tape-recording of George Raw born in 1892, ModE, Dent, dialect of Dentdale in the West Riding of Yorkshire[23])

The fact that the <-(e)s> morpheme is so widely used with respect to the singular and plural forms of verbs is captured by the *Northern subject rule*[24] according to which "the verb takes the *–s* ending in all persons, unless it is adjacent to a personal pronoun subject; and except for the 3rd person sg, where *–s* is used regardless."[25] This rule is "well attested in the *SED* tape recordings of the 1950s"[26] and also in the *Newcastle Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* (NECTE). At the same time, its widespread occurrence seems to stand in stark contrast to examples like *I says,* at first sight constituting a blatant violation of the rule. This apparent violation may, however, be explained through "variation in subject-verb concord," a quite common phenomenon in the case of non-standard varieties in general,

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[22] Arthur Hughes, Peter Trudgill, and Dominic Watt, *English Accents and Dialects* (2005), pp. 124, 125, lines 3, 9–10.

[23] Bertil Hedevind, *The Dialect of Dentdale in the West Riding of Yorkshire* (Uppsala: *Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia,* PhD Diss., 1967), p. 295, line 18.

[24] Ossi Ihalainen, "The dialects of England since 1776", in: *The Cambridge History of the English Language. Vol. 5,* ed. Robert Burchfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 214.

[25] Juhani Klemola and Mark Jones, "The Leeds Corpus of English dialects-project," *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 30 (1999), p. 26.

[26] Katie Wales, *Northern English* (2006)*,* p. 188.

which rather than a proof for refutation of the rule should be perceived as a proof of regional variety.[27]

The rivalry between forms observed within the groups of both the nominal and verbal endings may be analysed from many different perspectives, some of them being founded on the solid basis of Darwinian's *survival of the fittest* and the postulates of Evolutionary Phonology, which "associates errors in transmission of sound patterns with the general typology of phonetically conditioned sound change."[28] This typology outlines three primary reasons motivating sound changes referred to by Blevins as *change*, *chance* and *choice*, which correspond to the idea of mishearing sounds, replacing an ambiguous sound with a perceptually correct equivalent, and choosing a phonologically most suitable sound from the range of variants, respectively.[29] The rivalry between the nominal morphemes <-(e)n> and <-(e)s>, and the ultimate victory of the latter, may be seen thus as a result of "reduction of unaccented syllables"[30] and the subsequent loss of the productivity of <-(e)n> which might have been perceived as no longer the best exemplar of the variants in the speaker's grammatical repertoire. The process of weakening is also very often related to the functional concept of sign prominence, which, however, might sometimes be difficult to apply, for example in the case of the other rivalry, observed in the verbal endings <-(e)s> and <-(e)th>, phonetically represented by fricatives operating on a similar level of the sonority scale.[31] It seems probable that instead of sound prominence, the survival of the <-(e)s> morpheme might have been attributed to the abovementioned process of analogy. The resultant extension of the morpheme to other forms might have come, in turn, as major simplification in the use, which, *chosen* by the speaker, was able to gain foothold in the linguistic system, first in the North and then also in other dialects. The current productivity of the morpheme confirms the continuously high applicability of the process of analogy, which could again be explained in terms of the abovementioned perceptual dialectology and folk linguistics, advocating such concepts as

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Juliette Blevins, *Evolutionary Phonology* (2004), p. 32.

[29] Ibid., pp. 32–33.

[30] Jerzy Wełna, *English Historical Morphology* (1996), p. 89.

[31] Alan Cruttenden Gimson, *Gimson's Pronunciation of English. 6th edition*. Revised ed. (London: Arnold, 1962), p. 49.

regional identity, beliefs and background to be the reasons for promoting local patterns.

The idea of perceptual dialectology seems to be neatly interlaced with the analysis carried out so far, presenting the Northern dialect both as a forerunner of many morphological innovations and as a vehicle for simpler communication and more symmetrical systems, to an extent motivated by phonological factors such as sign prominence and sound sonority. A similar trend may be observed in the case of the definite article *the* coming from the Old English demonstratives *se* and *séo,* later þ*e* and þéo.[32] It is quite likely that the replacement of sounds first took place in Northumbria in the early 10th century, again as a result of analogy, this time observed between the Old English and Scandinavian variants (8a).[33] The change occurred in the Northern masculine and feminine forms of demonstratives which later transformed into the definite article *the* in all the genders in all the dialects (8b).[34]

> (8) (a) (…) ðe ecelice dæg (…) (line 212)
> *[(…) the eternal day (…)]*
> (…) ðe cirica (…) (line 216)
> *[(…) the church (…)]*
> (…) ðe eadges hehstaldes (…) (line 374)
> *[(…) the happy/wealthy young men/bachelors/knights (…)]*
> (*Durham Ritual,* LOE, c. 950–1050, Northumbrian, HC)
>
> (b) Bot yhit has **the** saul mare drede þan. (line 66)
> *[But yet has the soul more dread than that.]*
> Sal be mar þan alle þe ioyes of **the** world may be (…) (line 551)
> *[Should be more than all the joys of the world there may be (…)]*
> (*Pricke of Conscience,* ME, c. 1350–1420, Northern, HC)

The fact that the above change initiated in the North again proves the innovative character of the dialect; yet, what is even more intriguing is that the operation of the change is still much in progress, resulting in another phenomenon known as *definite article reduction* (DAR), leading to reduction or even loss of *the*, realized phonetically as the glottal stop [ʔ],

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[32] *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[33] Jerzy Wełna, *English Historical Morphology* (1996), p. 47.
[34] OED.

fricative [ð] or suspended [t], when followed by a dental, and represented in spelling as <t>, <th> or <t'> respectively (9).[35] According to Jones, DAR "is perhaps the most stereotypical feature of northern British English dialects, especially those of Yorkshire and Lancashire."[36]

> (9) (a) Aw niver *did* think tuh say **t'** day ut Aw mud lave **th'** owld place (…)
> *[I never did think to see* the *day that I'd have to leave* the *old place (…)]*
> (ModE, dialect of Haworth in Yorkshire[37])
>
> (b) To be browt into **th'** warld (…)
> *[To be brought into* the *world (…)]*
> (ModE, Lancashire dialect[38])
>
> (c) **T** next move he wor flyin ower **t** wall.
> *[*The *next move he was flying over* the *wall.]*
> (ModE, dialect of Yorkshire[39])

The distribution of the variants of the article seems highly varied, depending on the area, age group and social class, while in the semi-phonetic representation typical of dialect literature, the article may also be marked as <t'>, <th'>, or it may be even completely omitted.[40] This, on the other hand, makes DAR a phenomenon strictly contingent upon *stylistic variation*, i.e. "variation conditioned by speakers' perception of the situation in which they are speaking."[41] According to Rácz, the scope of operation of DAR depends on the phonetic environment and the type of discourse, being "affected by the social dynamics in the dialect areas, and has a large range of variants, some occurring only in restricted

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[35] Katie Wales, *Northern English* (2006), p. 187, and Joseph Wright, *The English Dialect Grammar* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1905), pp. 237–238, 259.

[36] Mark J. Jones, "The origin of Definite Article Reduction in northern English dialects: evidence from dialect allomorphy," *English Language and Linguistics* 6 (2002), p. 325.

[37] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), edited by Beth Newman (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2007), p. 153.

[38] *Oldham Weaver* in Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (London: Penguin, 1848 [1994]), p. 32, lines 2, 6.

[39] Geoffrey de Robinson, *Humour from the Ridings. Chulton Parva Chronicles* (York: Yorkshire Dialect Society, n.d.), p. 15, line 6–7.

[40] Joan C. Beal, "English dialects in the North of England: morphology and syntax," in: *Varieties of English 1. The British Isles*, eds. Bernd Kortmann and Clive Upton (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), p. 380.

[41] Arthur Hughes, Peter Trudgill, and Dominic Watt, *English Accents and Dialects* (2005), p. 7.

dialectal areas, others in overlapping larger ones."[42] Irrespective of its representations, however, it seems clear that DAR tends to reflect a strong motivation evident in the Northern dialect towards morphological simplification and innovative patterns. This motivation may be observed directly in the substantial segment reduction, hence higher economy of the language itself.

A similar tendency for simplification is heavily attested in the use of periphrastic *do* (*not*), which, however, did not become a separate grammatical category until Early New English (10).[43] Its exact origins are still debatable and many scholars attribute its emergence to either literary or colloquial sources, with its development rapidly gaining ground in the 16th century, first in interrogatives and then in negative declaratives.[44] The gradual loss of *ne* and grammaticalization of the auxiliary occurred in all the dialects, being a direct result of elimination of complex negative structures formed by combination of a negative particle and the main verb.

> (10) (a) (…) **ne** me hrutendo hrisil scelfath (…) (line 8–9)
> *[(…) nor does the whirring shuttle shake me (…)]*
> (*Leiden Riddle,* OE, c. – 850, Northumbrian, HC)
>
> (b) (…) **ne** gesege he deað (…) (line 403)
> *[(…) he doesn't see death (…)]*
> (*Lindisfarne Gospels,* LOE, c. 950–1050, Northumbrian, HC)
>
> (c) For he **ne** had neuer sa gret envie (…) (line 1168)
> *[Because he never (not) had such a great envy (…)]*
> (*Cursor Mundi,* ME, date of the manuscript: c. 1350–1420, Northern, HC)
>
> (d) If yah **dunnut** loike wer company (…)
> *[If you don't like our company (…)]*
> (ModE, dialect of Haworth in Yorkshire[45])

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[42] Péter Rácz, "Operationalising salience: definite article reduction in the North of England," *English Language and Linguistics*, 16 (2012), p. 64.

[43] Jerzy Wełna, *English Historical Morphology* (1996), p. 167.

[44] Terttu Nevalainen, "Mapping changes in Tudor English," in: *The Oxford History of English*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 200.

[45] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), p. 154, line 45.

While the same process of grammaticalization was recorded in the North, in this dialect, it has progressed even further, allowing for certain modifications and giving rise to different variants, such as *divvn't,* the use of which is attested by the *Survey of English Dialects* (SED) in the regions of Northumberland, Durham and Cumbria. Although the provenance of *divvn't* still seems uncertain, the new auxiliary clearly reflects one of the Northern phonological processes, i.e. *Northern Fronting* of the vowel [i], and some of the grammatical simplifications described earlier. The latter is evident in the syntactic change in the application of the auxiliary, which may be used irrespective of person or number in place of either *don't* and *doesn't*,[46] or irrespective of person, number or even tense, as *don't, doesn't,* and *didn't* (11).[47]

> (11) (a) The English **divvent** want we and the Scots winna have we.
> *[The English <u>don't</u> want us and the Scots won't have us.]*
> (statement of the MP for Newcastle, ModE, 1991, dialect of Newcastle[48])
>
> (b) **Divvn't** worry, pet – No decision's been made to target Iraq.
> *[<u>Don't</u> worry, pet – No decision's been made to target Iraq.]*
> (ModE, dialect of Durham[49])
>
> (c) 'I've been pushed for money ever since!' So they **divven't** come back.
> *['I've been pushed for money ever since! So they <u>didn't</u> come back.]*
> (recording of a fifty-year-old speaker from Tyneside, ModE, dialect of Northumberland –Geordie[50])
>
> (d) We **divvn't** want to gan doon that road.
> *[We <u>don't</u> want to go down that road.]*
> (ModE, dialect of Newcastle[51])

The analysis of periphrastic *do* shows that *divvn't* may fulfill various syntactic functions, operating as a form of expression of an imperative as well as present and past tense indicative. Curiously, it also demonstrates

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[46] Katie Wales, *Northern English* (2006)*,* pp. 31, 190.

[47] Arthur Hughes, Peter Trudgill, and Dominic Watt, *English Accents and Dialects* (2005), p. 126.

[48] Dominic Watt, " 'I don't speak with a Geordie accent, I speak, like, the Northern accent': contact-induced levelling in the Tyneside vowel system," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 6 (2002), p. 53.

[49] *Independent,* 4th September 2002.

[50] Arthur Hughes, Peter Trudgill, and Dominic Watt, *English Accents and Dialects* (2005), p. 124, lines 5–6.

[51] *ChronicleLive*, 6th February 2004.

varied spelling, <divvn't>, <divvent>, <divven't>, which may be explained through stylistic variation introduced earlier in the case of DAR. The fact that the auxiliary performs different roles in the discourse again seems to confirm the general characteristics of the Northern dialect as a medium aiming at economically more efficient patterns involving fewer and more universal solutions in terms of both its morphology and syntax.

This simplification in syntax may also be found in the case of irregular verbs recorded in many Northern varieties, such as Geordie in the Tyneside area. The following analysis will be based on five items from five different classes of Old English strong verbs, corresponding to the appropriate classes in Middle English, as shown in the tables below:

Table 3. Old English strong verbs (adapted from Reszkiewicz[52])

CLASS	INFINITIVE	PRETERITE (1 or 3 Sg)	PAST PARTICIPLE	EXAMPLE OF THE VERB
I	iː	ɑː	i	wriːtɑn
III	i	ɑ	u	sincɑn
V	e	æ	e	etɑn
VI	ɑ	oː	ɑ	tɑcɑn
VII	any vowel	eːo	any vowel	feallɑn

Table 4. Middle English verbs (adapted from Fisiak[53])

CLASS	INFINITIVE	PRETERITE (1 or 3 Sg)	PAST PARTICIPLE	EXAMPLE OF THE VERB
I (1)	ɑː	oː	ɑː	tɑːken
I (2)	any vowel	eː	any vowel	fallen
II (1)	iː	ɔː/ɑː	i	wriːten
II (2)	i	ɔ/ɑ	u	sinken
II (3)	ɛː	a	eː	ɛːten

The above classification is based on vocalic alternation in the verbal stems, which clearly shows that the corresponding classes in Old and

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[52] Alfred Reszkiewicz, *Synchronic Essentials of Old English* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1998), pp. 58–60.

[53] Jacek Fisiak, *A Short Grammar of Middle English* (2004), pp. 99–100.

Middle English allow for similar vowel alternants, laying the foundations for the modern irregular vocalic groups,[54] as demonstrated in Table 5. Considering all the phonological changes taking place throughout the period, one may still agree that the development of the vocalic elements in the stems of the modern verbs seems to reflect the development of vowels in the verbal stems in Old and Middle English.

Table 5. Modern English irregular verbs (adapted from Wełna[55])

INFINITIVE	PRETERITE	PAST PARTICIPLE	EXAMPLE OF THE VERB
eɪ	ʊ	eɪ (+ -en)	take
ɔː	e	ɔː (+ -en)	fall
aɪ	əʊ	ɪ (+ -en)	write
ɪ	æ	ʌ	sink
iː	e	iː (+ -en)	eat

This model, however, appears not to be so ubiquitous in today's North, where in many cases verbs tend to undergo the process of *levelling*, as a result of which the past tense (preterite) and past participle forms become identical/levelled,[56] as presented in Table 6:

Table 6. Examples of modern Northern English verbs with levelled forms (adapted from Beal[57])

INFINITIVE	PRETERITE	PAST PARTICIPLE	EXAMPLE OF THE VERB
bite	bit	bit	bite
break	broke	broke	break
go	went	went	go
speak	spoke	spoke	speak
write	wrote	wrote	write

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[54] Ibid., p. 99.
[55] Jerzy Wełna, *English Historical Morphology* (1996), pp. 179–184.
[56] Joan C. Beal, "English dialects in the North of England: morphology and syntax" (2008), p. 374.
[57] Ibid., p. 375.

The tendency for levelling the forms is well attested in for example Tyneside English, where it seems common to introduce "levelled" paradigms sometimes even for verbs which tend to be regular in Standard English, such as *treat – tret – tret*.[58] This frequent merger between the forms of the preterite and past participle proves operative also in the previously studied verbs, as shown in Table 7:

Table 7. Examples of modern Tyneside English verbs with levelled forms (adapted from McDonald[59]):

INFINITIVE	PRETERITE	PAST PARTICIPLE	EXAMPLE OF THE VERB
take	took	took	take
fall	fell	fell	fall
write	wrote	wrote	write
eat	ate	ate	eat
sink	sunk	sunk	sink

While the above examples mostly demonstrate the levelling of variants through replacement of the past participle by the preterite form, the last verb undergoes reversed substitution of the preterite for the past participle, which, according to some studies, appears to be common development, traced back to Old English. This type of levelling seems sometimes even more natural since the past participle forms "conform to the system-defining structural properties of English, thus easing the cognitive load of the language learner (and language user)."[60] Irrespective of the direction in which the forms have levelled, what seems evident is that the extension of forms, probably also by analogy, has again added up to considerable simplification and regularization of the patterns in the Northern verbal paradigm.

Surely, it may be argued that the nature of such changes is very often quite complex and at times even unpredictable, and to account for that,

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[58] Ibid, p. 375.

[59] Christine McDonald, *Some contrasts in teachers' and pupils' language and aspects of their relevance in the classroom* (University of Newcastle: unpubl. Graduate Certificate of Education Diss., 1980), pp. 28-29.

[60] Lieselotte Anderwald, "Norm vs Variation in British English Irregular Verbs: The Case of Past Tense *Sang* vs *Sung,*" *English Language and Linguistics* 15.1 (2011), p. 106.

one needs to take into consideration various factors, such as functional motivation, analogy, optimisation, articulatory and auditory properties as well as environmental aspects like speakers' perception or the ability of the change to become integrated into a broader sociolinguistic context. Yet, what the above analysis clearly confirms is that certain trends present in the North have had a substantial and undeniable impact on the morphosyntactic system of the Northern dialects today, contributing to their more inventive and innovative character.

3. Conclusions

Since the early times the North has always been associated with specific cultural, geographic, historical and linguistic constructs, corresponding to its dialectal, social and territorial boundaries. As a region, it is highly varied, and it seems quite difficult to delineate or even precisely explain what the North really is as more often than not the Northern area and its dialects prove to be a makeup of various social and linguistic elements defying clear categorisation. Therefore, many studies, like Montgomery's perceptual dialectological analysis[61] or more recent research on the dialect syntax by Willis, aimed at combining geospatial data analysis with the theoretical study of morpholinguistic inventions,[62] try to capture the motivation behind certain linguistic patterns from a speaker's perspective as a subject responsible for linguistic diffusion and variation. These and many other theoretical approaches directed at explaining reasons for linguistic changes, together with the previously mentioned concepts from the functional theory, evolutionary phonology, analogy and socioenvironmental studies, constitute a bold attempt to grasp the idea of the dialectal mechanisms in general. The purpose of the above analysis was to examine a few of those mechanisms operating in the Northern dialect, which as a medium has proved to be characterised by a strong drive to introduce morphologically and syntactically more advanced systems. This is observed in the changes initiated in such areas as nominal and verbal inflection, pronouns, definite articles, auxiliaries, and irregular verbs, the first three of which

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[61] Christopher Montgomery, *Northern English Dialects. A Perceptual Approach* (The University of Sheffield. Ph.D. diss., 2007).

[62] David Willis, "Dialect syntax as a testbed for models of innovation and change: Modals and negative concord in the *Syntactic Atlas of Welsh Dialects*," *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 4(1): 31 (2019), pp. 1–30.

have been adapted also by other varieties, emphasizing thus not only the innovative but also influential character of Northern English, while the last three show the continuous tendency in the North to introduce new morphological and syntactic solutions. For practical reasons, this study has concentrated exclusively on a few chosen features and as such it has not yet formed a complete reflection of the Northern morphosyntactic system. The characteristics discussed seem, however, sufficient to confirm the hypothesis that to some extent the Northern dialect has always aimed at more avant-garde, efficient, symmetrical and innovative morphological and syntactic paradigms. By introducing various simplifications it has become a precursor of many changes which all play an important part in the linguistic makeup of the Northern dialect today.

Agnieszka Kocel-Duraj
The innovative North – the morphosyntactic makeup of
Northern English features

The purpose of the article is to show the Northern English dialect as a complex creation dependent on various geographical, cultural and social factors responsible for its fluidity and changeable nature. Its strong tendencies towards developing new linguistic solutions are considerably manifested in the morphological and syntactic system which since the very beginning has been subject to alternations, sometimes affecting even other English dialects. The analysis of such areas as nominal and verbal inflection, pronouns, definite articles, auxiliaries, and irregular verbs, makes it tempting to notice certain regular patterns aimed at introducing modern, more economical and thus improved linguistic models. The character and motivation of these novel creations is at times perplexing and calls for arguments not only from historical linguistics, but also geographical and perceptual dialectology as well as functional and evolutionary theories. What is beyond any doubt, however, is that as a result of those new solutions the Northern dialect has become a special sociolinguistic construct whose specific morphosyntactic makeup reveals a unique and innovative dimension defining the North both of the past and of today.